

ST. LOUIS SOCIETY FOR THE BLIND

62nd Annual Meeting - April 10, 1973

Missouri School for the Blind

Annual Report, Executive Director, Bob Leighninger

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Good Evening Members of the Board, the Society and Friends. Welcome to the 62nd annual meeting of Missouri's oldest social agency addressing itself to the problems of sight and its deprivation.

Tonights report will be different. I want to share with you a film produced by the American Foundation for the Blind which serves as an excellent starting place for my discussion of the future of this unique agency.

(Film - WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU SEE A BLIND PERSON? is shown).

Randy Stinebaker and I have effectively used this outstanding film dozens of times as a means of helping an audience to feel more comfortable with blind people. It becomes a springboard for a change in attitudes toward blindness. We explode myths about stereotypes, describe some competent, successfully employed blind friends and establish the point that the biggest obstacle facing competent blind people is not their own blindness but the blindness of the sighted public!

Unfortunately for them, this indictment includes board members, agency directors and staff of many agencies specializing in services to the blind. Perhaps unconsciously, there still exists that first class, second class relationship that betrays those that envision themselves as working for the blind.

We believe our history spotlights a significant difference in this unique agency. We work with the blind.

As a Webster College senior, accomplishing a four year course in three years, Randy, over the past six months has volunteered his afternoons to the Society. He attends college in the morning, works industriously for us in the afternoon, and does his homework in the evening.

Should you call in the afternoon, his is the first voice that you hear. He handles routine questions, our expanding cab service to all forms of medical treatment and our aids and appliance display. His is an English major, interested in public relations, has taken over the primary responsibility of our most popular speaking program, and has written and handled most of the front page publicity we have recently received. Since he had no official standing, I was quoted, but it was actually Stinebaker who should have the credit.

Should the board see fit to approve my recommendation, at their meeting, following this, he will become the second blind person employed by the Society. Adeline Ruenzi was the first. She was the first home teacher in the state, when the bureau was formed. She transferred to the State, developed and headed Home Teacher Service, and upon retirement, founded and directed her Service Club for the Blind.

Randy's employment will be good for several reasons. He will be of great help to me in expanding public information, so vital to prevention, and will do much to change public attitudes, reinforcing our contention that the best salesman for this is a competent blind person.

During the past six months, Randy has amassed the largest number of hours of any of our volunteers this year and is therefore deserving of special recognition as the first recipient of our Certificate of Appreciation. Randy, will you please rise while our President, Dr. Jim Bryan, hands you this token of appreciation. Thank you Randy, for your invaluable help.

(Note - The Board of Directors approved Randy Stinebaker's employment retroactive to Jan. 1, 1973.)

Ron Coleman, our blind second year law student volunteer, received his certificate in 1969. This summer he gave us full time help for several weeks. During that time he was successful in persuading Ed Arthur to reinstate our theatre ticket program. In fact, Mr. Arthur expanded it to include all of his

theatres, at any time, and without the 50¢ service fee!

It was also during this period of time that we got behind W.M.R.Y.'s Talking Book Radio Project. He, along with John Frein, composed and supervised the distribution of a three page informational letter to more than 6000 Talking Book Subscribers in Missouri and Illinois. Ron, for your weeks of full time service, please rise and receive our applause of Thanks!

John Frein, our blind high school history teacher volunteer, not only went to Chicago with us to participate in the A.F.B. sponsored conference on Attitudes Toward Blindness, but has become the force behind our State Committee, which, on April 25th, in this same auditorium, will sponsor a public information afternoon on services for the blind. This is a program I have dreamed about for years, John, and our committee, are making it a reality - another "first" in Missouri!

In addition, John is General Chairman of the Friends of W.M.R.Y.'s Radio Talking Book Baseball Benefit, which the Lions of District 26-A will sponsor. Thru your efforts thousands of Lions and friends will assemble at Busch Stadium, Sunday afternoon, May 27th. John Weidlich, our blind Channel 11 Newscaster, will M.C. opening ceremonies. Ted Simmons, Honorary Chairman will catch the first pitch from a blind M.S.B. student, the school choir will sing the National Anthem and Lions Governors and Governors elect will be introduced.

John, for your many hours of service to the Society, the Lions and W.M.R.Y.'s Radio Talking Book, our Certificate of Appreciation.

Miss Leona Petersen, who received our Certificate in 1970, has added another year of service, coming in one day each week to help us with our office routine. Thank you, Leona!

Misses Celia and Agnes Diller are new volunteers this past year. They come each Thursday and give us a full day of hard work. Not only are they members of R.I.T.E., since Agnes is visually handicapped, but they are members of the American Association of Retired Persons, and have been instrumental in getting many chapters in the state to contribute to W.M.R.Y.'s Radio Talking Book project. Celia and Agnes, here is a symbol of our appreciation for your year of service!

Rosalie Luedders, recipient of our Certificate in 1968 has again given us some days of service when she was not working at the Light House. Rosalie, again our sincere thanks for your continued interest and support.

In the annual reports of 1969, 1970, and 1971 we called your attention to the problems facing Wolfner Library for the Blind. At our suggestion, Missouri Federation of the Blind appointed Assunta Lilly Chairman of a Library Committee. Under her leadership the Missouri Legislators restored the full appropriation, the library staff received full support from top administration and the staff was thus able to rebuild morale and make great progress in improving service. The picture has improved a great deal since we evidenced support of their efforts. Assunta has earned further distinction this year. She was the regional finalist for the President's handicapped person of the year award. She and Fred have just returned from Washington, D. C. Although as one of ten finalists, she was not chosen #1 in the U.S.A. she is #1 here in the Mid-West, a rare distinction! Assunta, may we add this token of appreciation to your collection'.

Ken Walter has been working very hard at home to make W.M.R.Y. known to the public, to attract reader volunteers, and to attract financial support. He motivated the Lady Lions to sponsor a Lions Open House April 29th from 2:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. at the station, and he is doing his utmost to assist John Frien with the Lions Baseball benefit. Ken has worked so hard that he almost pushed himself into a physical breakdown. Ken, for your efforts, above and beyond the call of duty, please accept this token of recognition!

And, finally, an award that not even the staff was expecting. It is not customary for the Society to award Certificates to Board Members. They work behind the scenes without concern for public recognition. During the nine years that it has been my privilege to be your Director, one of the great sources of satisfaction to me was the opportunity to work with a board member who is a key medical advisor for the Society, the Eye Bank, and the

State Bureau.

It gives me a great deal of personal satisfaction to publicly recognize one of the outstanding Ophthalmologists, Surgeons and supporters of this agency that we have. Dr. Robert C. Drews, will you please rise and accept this token of my appreciation for all of the help that you have so generously given to me and to the Society.

Friends, you will notice that 7 of the 10 people who received recognition tonight were visually handicapped. This is proof positive that blind people are supporting the Society and are leaders in helping to solve problems.

This past year has been filled with important events, but none can compare with the news of the Bountiful Virginia Bullock bequest.

In each of the past three annual reports we emphasized the need for public concern for more services for the forgotten majority - the older newly blinded persons. We promised to do all within our power to improve services to the neglected majority. Thanks to the foresight of Mrs. Bullock, I am proud to tell you that a number of blind people who are ineligible for vocational rehabilitation services, are already receiving long cane mobility training provided by our Society! This program is temporarily headed by Brian Buonanni, a graduate student in Hospital and Health Care Administration at St. Louis University. Brian became a certified Peripatologist at Boston College in 1968 and did much of his work at Father Tom Carrul's St. Raphael Geriatric Adjustment Center. Brian, please rise and be recognized.

Brian has Allen Stibbens working with him. Allen is in charge of the special resource room for the County Special School District and we ask Allen to arise and be recognized.

Both of these young men have other careers ahead and are not candidates for full time employment. We have need for a full time mobility expert. We need a very special person, one who has empathy for and the ability to reach and motivate older newly blinded people. We need a person who will work in the inner city just as effectively as in suburbia. After six months of searching our Committee has found that special person.

Roosevelt "Ted" Whitters managed a nursing home comprised predominately of senior citizens. He was a successful and highly regarded St. Louis City school teacher, and more recently headed the Adult Education Department for H.D.C.

"Ted" will go to Pittsburgh for six months of intensive training under James Kimbrough, head of the Mobility Department of the Greater Pittsburgh Guild for the Blind, one of the nations outstanding Rehab. Centers. He will return at the end of October to become our Mobility Specialist. He will be part of a team comprised of the Bureau Counselor, the Bureau Home Teacher, and our Mobility Specialist.

This cooperative venture, that of a private agency person working as part of a team with state agency personnel, is a "first" in Missouri and perhaps a "first" in the nation.

Ted, will you please join me on the platform? While you are coming forward we would like to have Yvonne and the four children stand and be recognized. We are fortunate to have found a person of Ted's caliber to add to our staff!

Although providing mobility lessons to older newly blinded is a first step there is much more that should be done. Recent studies here and in England indicate that 50% to 60% of the residents of long term care facilities are not only visually handicapped but have had no eye care. If this is true of most Nursing and Retirement homes it may also be true of the general public. It is therefore apparent that St. Louis needs a full time consultant for the aging blind. This person would spend his time teaching the staff of each of the 100 Residential Homes in St. Louis first, how to identify the visually handicapped, second, basic techniques in working with them, and third how to include them in their programs.

Ed. Brennan can tell you that even the nurses at McMillan, one of the Country's finest eye hospitals, had little or no expertise in working with visually handicapped patients. This consultant would work with the hospitals, the Mayor's council, the County Supervisor's council, the Model Cities program and as many of the senior citizens groups as he can find.

Although many agencies and programs are having to reduce budgets and curtail services, programs for the aging are being funded and expanded. Senior citizen groups are forming and flexing their muscles. A specialized agency needs to serve as a source for consultation and public information on blindness for non-specialized agencies and organizations.

Just this week I read a new study prepared by the A.F.B. It surveyed a half dozen cities in several states. Where an agency serving the blind provided leadership the visually impaired were being included in programming and where there was no such leadership they were forgotten. Its as simple as that!

Among the St. Louis agencies there is no one on the horizon with the time or the expertise to work in this area.

The St. Louis Society for the Blind must not only alert the community to the need for this leadership but find a way to provide it.

I have talked to the United Fund and they have asked me to apply for funding. If I submitted such an application immediately and it were accepted, funding could not possibly begin until 1975.

That is entirely too late! The program planning and funding is going on right now. If we wait until 1975 a needy segment of our community will continue to be neglected.

Seven years ago the Minneapolis Society for the Blind recognized this need and started a pilot project aimed at just the long term care facilities. It now has a \$24,000.00 annual budget supported by their United Fund.

I have found the expert leader we need. He has given me a well documented program that I feel is superior to the Minneapolis program and we can do the job in St. Louis for a little more than half of their budget.

I will be asking our Board of Directors to help me find a way to finance this program immediately. We will explore every possibility, including that of getting cooperation from other agencies and organizations.

This top priority need focuses attention on another Society need - an advisory council comprised of visually handicapped leaders. I have, therefore, sent a letter to each of the five blind clubs, asking them to select a capable person to sit on such an advisory council. I have asked Darrel Lauer to represent the community at large. He is completing his Masters Degree in Social Work, with heavy emphasis on the problems of aging. Many of you already know Darrel as a successful social work supervisor and will appreciate why I wanted him on the council. Darrel, please rise and remain standing until we identify the entire council.

The Forward Club has chosen Ethel Lee. Ethel is unable to be with us tonight for she and Jim are about to welcome their third adopted child. This tiny youngster is on its way from Vietnam.

The St. Louis chapter of N.F.B. has chosen John Dower.

The Tower Club has chosen Marie Hamen Kelley.

R.I.T.E. has selected Fred Lilley and the United Workers for the Blind has asked Russel Liefeld.

These fine people will meet with me periodically and we will ask two key members from the board, one from the Administrative Committee and one from the Activities Committee to sit in. Together we will examine the various functions of our current programming and select priorities for future planning. In this way the distillation of our findings will be carried directly to the Board of Directors and will be further evidence of our philosophy of working with the blind instead of for the blind.

My friends, this has been an unusual year and it could turn out to be an outstanding year. For a long time your director has been working to coordinate the efforts of our many agencies and service clubs. Virginia Bullock has enabled us to "put our money where our mouth is"! Our transportation program brings us closer to our sister agency, the Service Club. History repeats itself and firms up the ties for Adeline Ruenzi came into blind work first as an employee of the Society.



Our mobility program ties us in again with the Bureau which we formed many long years ago.

W.M.R.Y.'s Radio Talking Book is successfully on the air. This breaks down state barriers and boundaries, just as our helping to send Mike Hammond, Lydell Pope and Robert West to New York for sight saving treatment aid. It ties us closer to the Lions and Masons, great volunteers for sight conservation and blind work.

We have started a youth movement, bringing talented young blind people into the picture. Charlene Hahn Stinebaker and John Frein went to Chicago with other agency directors to the A.F.B. conference on Attitudes Toward Blindness. These young people have joined our state committee.

Ron Coleman and Darrel Lauer went to Springfield with me to attend the M.F.B. State Convention. We sat up till 2:00 A.M. discussing needs for service in the community. They gained new respect for the pillars of M.F.B. and what they have accomplished over the years.

Ron Coleman, John Frein, Randy Stinebaker and Ken Walter were key people in helping get W.M.R.Y. on the air.

As a volunteer, Randy Stinebaker has proved to be a motivating force in another A.F.B. sponsored project. This will be a special demonstration to show how some blind youths can participate in ongoing summer recreation programs. Through his efforts Ernie McMillan will be a part of the program and Jay Randolph has asked John Aubel to do a special on Channel 5 - 6:00 and 10:00 news. He will then give us the film to be used in the other six states in our region.

During the nine years that you have allowed me the privilege of serving as your director, our agency has undergone much change. We have grown from a sleepy little agency into one that is taking a very active, viable part in community services. We are on the threshold of making a significant impact. If we continue to work together the nation will be looking at us as an example of how key blind and sighted people work together to improve and uplift services, to emphasize the importance of prevention, and to cooperate to improve the lifestyle of those who have encountered visual problems.

Thank you for allowing me another year of service as your Director.

P.S. Following this, Fr. Boni Attenbrink came to the podium to award W.M.R.Y.'s Radio Talking Book Certificate of Appreciation to the Society. He presented it to President James Bryan, M.D. and then gave a personal gift to the director.

Typed by a volunteer.

Mrs. Doris Sausser  
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